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# The Shaybanid State Under Abdullakhan II

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## ABSTRACT

This article explores the political, administrative, and foreign policy developments of the Bukhara Khanate during the reign of Abdullah Khan II (r. 1557–1598). It examines the consolidation of the Shaybanid state in Transoxiana, highlighting the internal struggles for power, feudal rivalries, and the eventual unification of the region under Abdullah Khan II. The study outlines the administrative structure of the khanate, emphasizing key offices such as the khan, devonbegi (chief minister), otaliq, naqib, and kökaldosh, and their roles in governance, military affairs, and religious matters. The article also analyzes the khanate's foreign relations, focusing on interactions with Safavid Iran, the Siberian Khanate, and the Baburid state in Hindustan. Particular attention is given to territorial conflicts over Khorasan, sectarian tensions between Sunni Bukhara and Shi'ite Safavids, and military campaigns led by Abdullah Khan II and his son Abdulmo'min. Additionally, the article addresses Bukhara's diplomatic and trade relations with Russia and Siberia, emphasizing the geopolitical and economic significance of these connections. The study concludes that Abdullah Khan II, despite relying on military force to maintain internal order, successfully strengthened the khanate's political authority, safeguarded its territorial integrity, and enhanced its regional and international standing through active diplomacy and strategic foreign policy.

**Keywords:** Jaloyir, mojar, qipchoq, ming, barxinlar, kenagas, shirin qushchi, Sibir xonligi, safaviy.

## INTRODUCTION

At the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century, Central Asia was characterized by deep political fragmentation, widespread feudal disunity, and intense competition among ruling dynasties. In this complex historical context, the arrival of the Uzbek tribes under the leadership of Shaybani Muhammad Sultan and their rapid consolidation as a major political force marked a significant turning point in the region's history. With Shaybani Khan's conquest of Samarkand and Bukhara in 1500, the Shaybanid dynasty was founded, initiating a new stage in Uzbek statehood. During the early decades of Shaybanid rule, restoring political stability, revitalizing economic life, and establishing a centralized administrative system became essential tasks. However,

internal dynastic rivalries, the ambitions of local feudal lords, and persistent struggles for the throne led to renewed fragmentation in Transoxiana from the first half of the sixteenth century onward. The situation deteriorated further after the death of Ubaydulla Khan (1533–1539), when a dual power structure emerged—one ruler in Bukhara and another in Samarkand—further weakening the political unity of the state. It was within this turbulent environment that Abdullah Khan II rose to prominence. Shaped by the political struggles of his youth, he overcame prolonged military conflicts and internal disputes, eventually succeeding in unifying Transoxiana under a single political authority in the second half of the sixteenth century. Under Abdullah Khan II, the Bukhara Khanate not only achieved internal stability but also emerged as a

leading political power in the region. Furthermore, his reign marked a new stage in foreign relations, particularly with Safavid Iran, Russia, the Siberian Khanate, and Baburid state in Hindustan.

In this regard, it is necessary to briefly outline the structure of state governance and the key offices and positions that played a central role within it. Administratively, the Bukhara Khanate was divided into provinces (vilayats) and districts (tumans). The khan held supreme and unrestricted authority; after consolidating the provincial and district governors, as well as the influential tribal chiefs around himself, he was able to pursue an independent political course. During the early Shaybanid period, supreme power did not pass from father to son but rather to the eldest male member of the dynasty. This tradition, inherited from steppe political culture, was initially preserved; however, beginning in the 1540s, the practice of hereditary succession—passing the throne from father to son—became increasingly dominant and eventually took a definitive form during the reign of Abdullah Khan II. The central government of the Shaybanids was known as the *dargāh* (court), which functioned as the highest state institution. Within this administrative system, the position of *devonbegi* (chief minister) enjoyed exceptional prestige, overseeing financial and economic affairs of the state.

It should be noted that the opinions and interests of high-ranking palace officials—such as the *kökaldosh*, *otaliq*, *naqib*, *vazir-i a'zam* (grand vizier), and other viziers—as well as important military officials like the *nuyon*, *tughegi*, *qutvol*, *dorugha*, and *qurchiboshi*, played a significant role in governmental decision-making. Likewise, prominent religious authorities—including the *Jo'ybor shaykhs*, *sadr* (head of religious endowments), and *shaykh al-Islam*—exercised considerable influence over state affairs. The office of “*naqib*” was among the most authoritative posts at the khan's court. The *naqib* was considered one of the ruler's closest and most trusted associates. Another crucial position was that of “*otaliq*”, typically appointed as the guardian and tutor responsible for the upbringing and political preparation of a minor prince. The title “*kökaldosh*” (literally “one who shared the same mother's milk”) also held substantial significance in state administration. Those who held this rank were entrusted with gathering intelligence about both friendly and hostile political powers, making the office an important link in diplomatic and internal security structures.

This article examines the political developments in the Bukhara Khanate during the reign of Abdullah Khan II, with special emphasis on the nature of its internal and external policies, the dynamics of its relations with the Safavid Empire and the Siberian Khanate, and the significance of these interactions in the broader history of Central Asia. At the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th century, when political fragmentation dominated Central Asia, the Uzbek tribes led by Shaybani Muhammad Sultan began to establish their authority in Transoxiana. With Shaybani Khan's conquest of Samarkand and Bukhara in 1500, the Shaybanid dynasty was founded, marking a new stage in Uzbek statehood. The rulers of this dynasty not only sought to stabilize internal affairs and develop the economy, but also paid particular attention to foreign policy, striving to strengthen their geopolitical position in Central Asia.

However, this domination did not last long. After Shaybani Khan's death, the state he had established and its administrative system gradually weakened. Struggles for the throne intensified, and by the first half of the 16th century feudal disunity and internal conflicts reached their peak in Transoxiana. After the death of Ubaydullakhan (1533–1539), the situation deteriorated even further, and a dual power emerged: Ubaydullakhan's son Abdulaziz Khan ruled in Bukhara (1540–1550), while Abdulatif Khan, the third son of Kuchkunchi Khan, ruled in Samarkand (1540–1551).

During this period the struggle among the Shaybanid sultans and major feudal lords for power intensified to such an extent that neither Abdulaziz Khan nor Abdulatif Khan could curb their ambitions. In this complex political environment, Baroq Khan, Abdulatif, and several other sultans—including Sultan Sayid, Muhammad Sultan and Burkhan Sultan—joined forces and attempted to seize Nasaf, Karmana, and Miyankal.

Amid these troubles, the young Abdullakhan (then only 18 years old) defended Miyankal fortress against the allied forces. Although a twelve-day siege ended with a truce, Abdullakhan continued efforts to regain Miyankal during 958–959 AH, though without success. Only in 1556, after a protracted and bloody struggle, did Abdullakhan secure victory over his rivals and achieve partial unification of Transoxiana. He was supported in this struggle by various Uzbek tribal groups—Shirin, Qushchi, O'tarchi, Kenagas, Besh yuz, Jaloyir, Mojar, Qipchoq, Ming, Barxin and others—as well as the clergy.

According to the long-standing custom among the Shaybanids, the eldest male member of the dynasty was to ascend the throne. At that time the eldest was Pirmuhammad Khan. However, Abdullakhan opposed his nomination, using the dispute over the governorship of Balkh as a pretext, and instead seated his own father, Iskandar Khan, on the throne. After Iskandar Khan's death in 1583, Abdullakhan declared himself the legitimate ruler and consolidated power in the realm.

During Abdullakhan II's reign, the Bukhara Khanate pursued an active foreign policy, establishing and expanding diplomatic relations with numerous states. "Sharafnama-yi shohī" records that envoys sent by Abdullakhan to Moscow returned in 1583 with large quantities of firearms, gunpowder, hunting birds, and textiles. Russian historian Zhukovskiy also corroborates that Bukhara envoys visited Moscow in 1589–1595, while academician V. V. Bartold notes that these missions primarily aimed to obtain hunting equipment—rifles, lead, gunpowder—and hunting birds.

Hafiz Tanish Bukhari's "Abdullanama" provides valuable information on the structure of the Shaybanid army and also describes the political relations between Abdullakhan of Transoxiana and the Mughal emperor Akbar (1556–1605). Their rivalry centered on control over Badakhshan, Northern Afghanistan, and Khorasan. By capturing Balkh and Badakhshan, Abdullakhan threatened Kabul, while Akbar, after conquering Sind in 1583 and Kashmir in 1586, approached the southern borders of the Uzbek state. Nonetheless, diplomatic exchanges continued, with Bukhara envoys in India and Mughal envoys in Bukhara between 1572 and 1578.

Abdullakhan's continuous campaigns between 1551 and 1582 were aimed at restoring unity in Transoxiana, reversing the fragmentation that followed Shaybani Khan's death, and strengthening central authority. His ruthless struggle against independent-minded Shaybanid sultans and major feudal lords resulted in the elimination of almost all members of the Abulkhayr Khan line. These relentless wars exhausted the population. Abdullakhan captured Shahrisabz (1557), Samarkand (1569), and after intermittent struggles from 1558 to 1572, secured Badakhshan, Balkh, and Hisor. He incorporated Tashkent, Sayram, Turkestan, and Fergana in 1582, Khorasan in 1583, and finally Khorezm in 1595. Despite the bloodshed, Abdullakhan II remains in history as the most powerful ruler after Amir Temur, having succeeded where many

Timurid princes had failed—uniting Transoxiana under a single political authority.

Relations between the Bukhara Khanate and Safavid Iran were tense, primarily due to competing interests in Khorasan—a region of strategic, economic, and religious significance to both states. Although diplomatic missions were exchanged, each side attempted to impose its own conditions. Relations deteriorated in 1586 when Muhammad Nazarbiy, the governor of Balkh, was dismissed and sent on pilgrimage to Mecca, simultaneously tasked with delivering a message to the Safavids, urging them to halt harassment of Sunni pilgrims. However, his demands were rejected, reflecting deep sectarian tensions. Even during Abdullakhan's lifetime, his son Abdulmo'min (156–1598) launched military campaigns against the Safavids, whose state religion was Shi'ism. In 1589 he captured Mashhad, desecrated the tomb of Shah Tahmasp near the shrine of Imam Ali Riza, and burnt his remains in retaliation for the earlier humiliation of Shaybani Khan's body by the Safavids—an act demonstrating that the conflict had symbolic and emotional dimensions beyond political rivalry.

In 1597 Abdullakhan II sent envoys to Shah Abbas I, but they were received coldly, and the Shah announced his intention to invade Khorasan the following spring. Thus, in the late 16th century, relations between the two powers were shaped by territorial disputes, sectarian conflict, and strategic rivalry. Relations between the Bukhara and Siberian Khanates up to 1598 were largely amicable, particularly in terms of trade. Many Bukharan Uzbeks lived in Siberia, and the Siberian Khan Kuchum maintained close contact with Abdullakhan II. Seeking to resist Russian expansion, Kuchum overthrew Moscow-aligned Edigar (Yodgor) and consolidated his own rule. Despite his ambition to unite the Siberian Khanate with Bukhara and create a broader Muslim front against Russian advances, Abdullakhan II was unable to provide timely military support due to ongoing campaigns in Turkistan. After Ermak's forces captured the Siberian capital, Kashliq (Isker), in 1583, Kuchum continued resistance, inflicting a significant defeat on the Russians in 1585, during which Ermak was killed. Yet the technological and logistical superiority of Moscow eventually prevailed. By 1591, Kuchum's family members were captured and sent to Moscow, and in 1598 he himself was defeated and killed in Nogai territory. Nonetheless, resistance continued among local Turkic groups. The events of this period illuminate Central Asia's influence in the northern steppe

and Russia's expanding presence beyond the Urals. The study of Bukhara–Siberia relations highlights the economic, diplomatic, and military connections between the two regions.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, during his forty-year reign, Abdullakhan II undertook numerous significant state reforms and political initiatives, although he failed to completely eliminate internal feudal conflicts. His reliance on military force to govern represented one of the major shortcomings of his rule. Even so, in foreign policy he generally favored cautious diplomacy and compromise, maintaining relatively peaceful relations with neighboring states. Particularly in dealings with Safavid Iran, he sought to preserve geopolitical balance. Moreover, through his foreign policy efforts he strengthened the political standing of the Bukhara Khanate, secured trade routes, and enhanced its international prestige. Abdullakhan II's diplomatic and military activities made a substantial contribution to preserving the independence and territorial integrity of the Bukhara state.

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